NAXOS

2 CDs

BACH

Sonatas and Partitas

for Solo Violin

Jaap Schröder, Baroque Violin

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001–1006

The earliest history of the violin has been surrounded by many questions. In recent years however several scholars have published the results of their research based on new documentary and organological evidence which contradicts the accepted wisdom about the Italian origin of the instrument. According to them it seems quite plausible that the oldest instrument of the violin type (*vihuela de arco*) was introduced from Spain when King Ferdinand expelled the Jews in 1492. The musicians among them settled in different parts of Europe, notably Flanders and northern Italy (from where many went to England), but also to Germany, Bohemia, Poland and Hungary. The next century saw not only the rising popularity of violin bands in several countries but also an interest by European instrument-makers such as the Amati family, makers of lutes and viols, hence the name *liutaio*, *luthier*, in making violins that proved to be of unsurpassed beauty. The creation of those new instruments had far-reaching consequences in the seventeenth century: the spirit of the baroque era found its perfect expression in the sound of the violin.

Not until 1610 do we see the first Italian compositions written specifically for the violin. At this time the *sonatore di violino* appears as a companion of the cometto-player, and over the next decades the violinist-composers of northern Italy and Germany invented and developed a new technique that exploited the proper characteristics of the violin and created a virtuoso repertoire idiomatic for the new age of eloquent rhetoric and poignant expressivity. Between Cima, the Milanese composer of the earliest violin sonata, and Corelli, who published his volume of violin sonatas on the first day of 1700, the progress is impressive, with individual peaks in the compositions of such violinists as Marina, Farina, Uccellini, Biber, Walther, and Westhoff. Whereas the Germans showed a preference for double-stop technique and for variation forms that favoured complicated bowings, the Italians never lost their affinity with *bel canto*, even in passage-work. At the start of the eighteenth century the violin concertos of Vivaldi were perhaps the epitome of virtuosity, and his influence on European musical life has been considerable, through his students as well as through his own travels and, over the long term, through the printed editions of his music.

The baroque musical language can be defined as, in essence, one or two solo lines sustained by a bass that indicates the harmonic progression. If we leave aside the popular song and dance repertoire as well as the quasi-improvisatory preludes and fantasies which players used as warm-up or study material, only a handful of compositions for the violin alone, without accompaniment, were written before Bach's time. Of these, it is possible that Bach knew about Biber's *Passacaglia*, the conclusion of the well-known cycle of *Rosary Sonatas* (ca. 1676), but he was certainly acquainted with Westhoff's solo suites, written around 1696. Both Biber and Westhoff took advantage of the variation principle and the dance suite to extend their technique of chord playing to a hitherto unknown level. Starting his professional career as a violinist in the court orchestra of Weimar in 1709, Bach absorbed these ideas from various German and Italian sources and, fusing them in his fertile imagination, was able to produce, as soon as the circumstances were favourable, a corpus of instrumental works that are characterized by a great originality of conception. During his years at the court in Cöthen, beginning in 1717, he wrote not only his six

solos for the violin, profound in spirit and monumental in scope, but also a unique volume of unaccompanied suites for the cello, whose emancipation as a solo instrument had begun only a few decades before. He further conceived the first duos for violin and obbligato harpsichord, a collection of six sonatas that constitute a ground-breaking compendium of ideas for this ensemble, and composed the six *Brandenburg Concertos*, a kaleidoscopic treasure of instrumental variety.

Quite possibly Bach had already begun work on the six solo sonatas and partitas for violin during his stay in Weimar. The beautiful autograph of these works, dating from 1720 scarcely more than a hundred years after Cima wrote the first violin sonata, seems to be a calligraphic labour of codification. The three sonatas of Bach's manuscript, alternating with the three partitas to form a cycle of three pairs, are structured after the Italian *sonata da chiesa*. The introductions (embellished adagios) and their following fugues derive in a direct line from the Corellian archetype. The partitas take the traditional dance suite as their model, but with individual differences: the one in B minor has a variant, or *double*, following each of the principal dances, resembling the suites in Walther's *Hortus chelicus*, a widely known compendium of German violin technique from 1688; the *Partita in D minor* follows the example of Couperin and other French composers by concluding the series of usual dances with an extended chaconne; and the *Partita in E major*, a succession of dances in a lighter vein preceded by a *Preludio*, seems to be inspired by the lute repertoire.

This short description shows how Bach, using stylistic and technical features from the musical world around him, created new shapes and structures which contributed to the later development not only of the solo literature for strings but also of the violin sonata with keyboard and the sinfonia concertante.

Being an outstanding string player himself with a keen appreciation of sound quality (he owned a violin made by Stainer, the most celebrated violin-maker of the baroque period until the middle of the eighteenth century), Bach may well have been able to play his own works, stimulated by the contact with virtuosi like Westhoff and Pisendel, whom he probably met in Dresden. His way of writing for the violin is eminently suited to the instrument, but his consummate musicianship and his mastery of the keyboard also enabled him to use the same material in a different medium. He chose the harpsichord, the organ, and the lute for a number of transcriptions, with a perfect sense of the particular character of each of those instruments. In Bach's immediate surroundings the six violin solos must have met with unusual admiration, for a number of mostly partial copies and a complete one by his wife's hand survive to this day. The autograph itself, the final compilation of previous manuscripts that are lost, remained in the possession of the Bach family until the middle of the nineteenth century. It then passed through several hands (we know that Brahms tried unsuccessfully to acquire it) before it came to the Berlin Royal Library in 1917, purchased from the estate of the Bach connoisseur Wilhelm Rust.

From the time of their composition the sonatas and partitas have presented violinists with technical challenges of the highest order. Even after Bach's death, when his composition style came to seem old-fashioned, succeeding generations of players remained intrigued by the problems posed by the polyphonic structures. The solo sonatas continued to be studied, albeit without full comprehension of their musical content. Usually they were referred to as "studies for the violin," as we can see in the first printed edition, published by Simrock in 1802. A few years earlier, in 1798, the French violinist

Jean Baptiste Cartier, a pupil of Viotti, had included the great C major fugue of the third sonata in his survey of the existing violin literature, *L'Art du violon*. Cartier mentioned the name of Pierre Gaviniès, a student of Jean-Marie Leclair, as being the owner of the Bach manuscript (one of the ambulant copies, of course), proving that the fame of the violin solos had reached the protagonists of the French violin world.

It was in Germany, however, that violinists as well as composers and musicologists would reach back in greatest number to their musical heritage, and after the first edition of 1802, a second printing of the complete solos (still called "studies" and destined to be used at the Leipzig Conservatory) was prepared in 1843 by the violinist Ferdinand David. He was the first one not only to print the text but also to add fingerings and bowings according to his own taste, and every subsequent edition (with the exception of those prepared by musicologists for the two complete Bach editions of 1879 and 1958) has continued to reflect the taste and stylistic preferences of its editor. Bach's music acts like a mirror and gives us a fascinating picture of the history of violin performance and of the succeeding views on the interpretation of baroque music in general.

What seems appropriate and right in one generation becomes old-fashioned and will be rejected in the next one, and no performance style is able to escape the critical judgement of a later period. It is not the continually more detailed knowledge about the past that is the severest judge; it is the ever-changing conception of taste, as applied in perfect good faith to the interpretation of Bach's music. *De gustibus non est disputandum* leads also to the conclusion that the taste of today will inevitably be deemed old-fashioned by the musicians of the early twenty-first century.

In recent years we have witnessed another phenomenon: a renewed interest in the nineteenth-century approach to Bach, based on an artistic appreciation of a certain taste for its own sake. One might be tempted to say that the history of taste moves in circles, whereas our historical knowledge moves in an upward line. If we acknowledge this distinction, it becomes possible to criticize as well as to enjoy certain romantic Bach arrangements - not the kind of arrangement common in the baroque age, practised by Bach himself, in which musical ideas are transferred to another instrument while preserving the same "language", but a rewriting process which had the intention of paraphrasing and "enriching" the original idea. While admiring Bach's creative genius, the romantic spirit was no longer in direct touch with the aesthetic ideas and the musical grammar of the eighteenth century, and considered the achievements of past generations fair game for adaptation to its own interpretations. The notion of faithfulness to the original text was not quintessential, and the idea of artistic freedom tended to generate serious misconceptions about many aspects of baroque practice ("if Bach had known the modern grand piano..."). With all his veneration for Bach, Mendelssohn was a child of his own time. Writing a piano accompaniment to Bach's solo sonatas, he followed his romantic inspiration and produced expressive harmonies that Bach had never dreamed of, ignoring the clear-cut character of the baroque phrasing by including deceptive cadences.

Similarly, performers tended to respond to the stylistic demands of their own generation by developing certain qualities in their playing, such as by drawing longer legato lines, to the detriment of the articulated sound, and by choosing fingerings that favoured expressive slides and avoided the open strings, thereby ignoring the baroque preference for an open and clear sound.

Since Ferdinand David's edition of 1843, almost

forty interpretations of Bach's text have appeared in print, each one representing the taste of a prominent virtuoso and teacher. Among these we find the names of Hellmesberger (1865), Rosé (1901), Joachim (1908), Auer (1917), Busch (1919), Flesch (1930), Galamian (1971), and, most recently, Szeryng (1979) and Schneiderhan (1987). Whatever the differences among all these players may be, however divergent their solutions to problems of interpretation, there is a common thread that links them all together: as performers immersed in the concert life of their respective generations, they used the tools of their own time. The sound of the violin, reflecting the changes in style over the past 150 years (the first public performance of a Bach solo took place in 1840), followed the requirements of the succeeding style periods. These changes entailed a gradual modification and adaptation of the violin and its bow. After the drastic alterations to the violin that took place during the last decades of the eighteenth century (involving replacement of the neck and the bass bar, in particular), violinists continued to look for help in coping with the increasing demands of a rising pitch and of romantic virtuosity. The solutions to these problems were notably the addition of a chin-rest (invented by Louis Spohr in the 1820s), the construction of weightier bows like the ones by Peccatte, and finally, at the end of the First World War, the fabrication of steel strings. It is typical that the history of musical performance, closely connected with the evolution of aesthetic perception, shows an ongoing tendency to heighten the musical tension by adjusting the pitch and consequently the playing technique. Not surprisingly, the resulting physical tension changed the mental attitude of musicians as they gradually lost touch with the performance style of the baroque. The uninterrupted legato stroke of the bow, in contrast with the articulated, flexible bow stroke of the past, stressed a new sense of monumentality which contradicted the grandeur of the old rhetorical gestures. In more recent times, steel strings have favoured the development of a tense vibrato, which has since become a basic ingredient of the violin sound, in contrast to the earlier practice of using vibrato as an ornamental embellishment, applied with conscious discernment to notes of a certain duration. It is not inaccurate to say that present-day performances are most often interpretations of the eighteenth-century text on nineteenth-century instruments with a twentieth-century technique.

Greatly enjoyable as any outstanding performance may be on its own terms, the complete loss of the baroque tradition has led to a reaction in recent generations among performers who rediscovered that the substance of the baroque message is convincing for its own inherent rhetorical and expressive qualities and should not serve as a point of departure for manifestations of soul-searching self-expression. We have, in other words, witnessed a return to the sources, not only according to the letter but also, more importantly, in spirit.

While our modern instruments (as well as valuable antiques set up under modern high tension) have acquired an impressive physical power, an increasing number of players have found a renewed delight in the old but never forgotten virtues of clarity and soberness of expression, of excitement through incisive rhythmic stimulation, of flexibility and delicacy of articulation. The idea that "less is more" has a relaxing influence on the physical tension of the body. The logical consequence of this approach has been a return to the original instruments and their playing technique.

It should he clear from the previous explanation that this trend toward the use of period instruments is more than a matter of historical curiosity. It serves the purpose

of a better and more congenial realisation of the baroque spirit, provided, of course, that the player is receptive to the qualities of that spirit. The modern violinist, accustomed to his instrument with modem fittings, may be able to recreate Bach's spirit to an admirable degree, but his tools (the violin as well as the bow) are meant to he used at present-day tension. The use of a baroque violin, with its resonant and clear sound, is able to reveal the specific attraction of a less pressured approach.

Looking briefly at the earliest performances of the Bach solos, we note that two pieces were in special favour: the *Chaconne* from the second *Partita* and the *Preludium* of the third, both of which were on Ferdinand David's recital programme in 1840. Joseph Joachim, in his London début concert in 1844 at the age of twelve, included two movements, an *Adagio* and a *Fugue*, from one of the sonatas. In the course of his long career, Joachim built a reputation as the foremost interpreter of Bach's music. In the nineteenth-century tradition of the *spectacle coupé* (a concert programme in which separate movements of a sonata or symphony were played in different parts of a performance), he would play only part of a sonata or partita in his recitals, most often the *Chaconne* and extracts from the *Partita in E major*. The oldest recordings, by Joachim and by Pablo de Sarasate, likewise present a few separate movements only; the designation of the solos as "studies" in the first part of the century may help to explain this custom and the lack of understanding for the musical integrity of their conception. On the other hand, it was Joachim who contributed most, throughout his long career and until his death in 1907, to the gradual inclusion of the solo sonatas and partitas into the standard repertoire and to the true understanding of their unique nature.

The present recording was made in 1984 and 1985, using a Dutch baroque violin and a baroque bow. The location was the village church of Oltingen in the canton of Basel in Switzerland, a space that seemed particularly favourable to the sound and atmosphere of Bach's music.

Jaap Schröder

Jaap Schröder

Jaap Schröder has had a long and varied career as a violinist. His life's work is a tapestry woven of the threads of all his achievements: chamber music, solo performances, conducting and teaching. He has travelled widely, sharing his expertise in the interpretation and performance of string music on authentic instruments from the baroque to the classical periods. The overall objective of his teaching and performing continues to be the desire to cherish and transmit the unique French tradition of violin playing, well known for its emphasis on the art of bowing, l'art de l'archet, and on the cultivation of a highly articulate expressivity. His own studies at the École Jacques Thibaud and with the Pasquier brothers, together with musicological studies in Paris and Amsterdam, have been of prime importance for his subsequent exploration of the baroque and classical techniques of playing. Jaap Schröder's achievements include nearly 150 recordings for various labels. Jos van Immerseel, Stanley Hoogland, Christopher Hogwood and Lambert Orkis are among those who have performed with him. For many years he played in the Netherlands String Quartet, Esterhazy Quartet and Smithson Quartet. He was also orchestra leader and conductor of Concerto Amsterdam and the Academy of Ancient Music.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001–1006

CD 1 — 68:43

Sonata No. 1 in G minor BWV 1001 — 16:12

1	Adagio	3:27
2	Fuga: Allegro	5:45
3	Siciliana	3:01
4	Presto	3:59

Partita No. 1 in B minor BWV 1002 — 29:04

5	Allemande	4:55
6	Double	3:13
7	Corrente	2:58
8	Double: Presto	4:06
9	Sarabande	3:33
10	Double	2:53
11	Tempo di Borea	3:48
12	Double	3:44

Sonata No. 2 in A minor BWV 1003 — 23:28

13	Grave	3:53
14	Fuga	8:35
15	Andante	5:11
16	Allegro	5:48

CD 2 — 74:17

Partita No. 2 in D minor BWV 1004 — 29:59

1	Allemande	4:55
2	Corrente	2:55
3	Sarabanda	3:49
4	Giga	4:28
5	Ciaccona	13:50

Sonata No. 3 in C major BWV 1005 — 24:49

6	Adagio	4:03
7	Fuga	11:51
8	Largo	3:02
9	Allegro assai	5:52

Partita No. 3 in E major BWV 1006 — 19:30

10	Preludio	4:22
11	Loure	3:17
12	Gavotte en Rondeau	3:12
13	Menuet I & II	5:09
14	Bourrée	1:35
15	Gigue	1:56

NAXOS

BACH: Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin

8.557563-64

Profound in spirit and monumental in scope Bach's *Six Sonatas and Partitas* for solo violin are arguably the most difficult original solo works ever written for the violin. Their formidable technical challenges, especially the persistent use of multiple stops, are not just virtuoso features but are the natural result of the complexity of Bach's musical ideas and his understanding of the instrument. The crowning glory of the set is the immense *Chaconne* from the *Partita in D minor*, a set of variations on a theme which makes unprecedented demands of the performer's expressive and technical abilities.

Johann Sebastian
BACH
(1685–1750)

Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin,
BVW 1001-1006

CD 1		68:43	CD 2		74:17
1-4	Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001	16:12	1-5	Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004	29:59
5-12	Partita No. 1 in B minor, BWV 1002	29:04	6-9	Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005	24:49
13-16	Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003	23:28	10-15	Partita No. 3 in E major, BWV 1006	19:30

Jaap Schröder, Baroque Violin

Recorded in the village church of Oltingen, Canton of Basel, Switzerland, in 1984-5
Producer: Kurt Deggeller • Executive Producer: Margaret Robinson • Engineer: Pere Casulleras
Previously released by the Smithsonian Institute • Booklet Notes: Jaap Schröder
Please see the booklet for a detailed track list • Cover Picture: *Still Life with Violin* by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) (State Hermitage Collection / AKG London)

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Playing Time
2:23:00

NAXOS
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